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March 6, 2009

State Of Connecticut  
Planning & Development Committee  
Legislative Office Building  
Hartford, Connecticut

Chairman Coleman, Chairman Sharkey and Members of the Planning and Development Committee. My name is Bruce Becker, and I am the president of Becker and Becker Associates, an integrated architecture and development firm based in Fairfield. I would like to express my strong support of the proposed green building tax credit, SB 1033. I testified last year in support of similar legislation, and the reasons why this legislation were important then have become all the more relevant and made this legislation all the more necessary in the current economic environment.

My firm is now working on a major \$190 million development project located in downtown New Haven, across the street from the State Street Train Station, known as 360 State Street. We are one of the lucky few construction projects in the state able to secure the majority of our private financing prior to the economic turmoil of last fall. A union pension fund has provided over 80% of the capital for this project, which has been supplemented by state funds supporting the affordable housing and fuel cell components of the project. Our ambition has always been to create the greenest building in the state of Connecticut, yet as the economy constricts and costs remain high, it has become impossible for projects such as 360 State Street to afford the additional costs associated with green building.

Last year, when I testified before this committee, I cautioned that the limited incentives available in the state made it difficult to build green in Connecticut. Today, it is not just difficult, it is all but impossible.

Neighboring states, like New York, have long-established policies of actively promoting green building and providing the financing to help make it happen, which has resulted in a robust market that has made green development standard practice. Several years ago, my firm's project The Octagon in Manhattan received \$5.6 million in green building tax credits, and is now one of the greenest multifamily buildings in New York state. We have received green building awards from the City, the State, and the federal Environmental Protection Agency, in addition to receiving LEED Silver designation. The green building tax credit helped to make this possible.

At 360 State Street, our ambitions are just as high. We are enrolled in the LEED for Neighborhood Development Pilot Program, and hope to include a range of energy efficiency technologies, along with other sustainable practices that will help to reduce the project's impact on both the electric grid and the environment. Tenants will also have the advantage of living in a building with easy access to public transportation, healthy building materials, and dramatically reduced utility bills. But doing this comes at a cost.

Right now we are being forced to make very real decisions on this project about whether or not to include green building features, like more efficient heat pumps and high performance windows to reduce our heating and air conditioning loads. If we know that there is funding that will eventually come our way, we will make those additional investments in the project that we know will make a better building in the long run. Yet without some assurance of funding to come, we cannot take that risk.

Even though funding would not be distributed for many years, establishing this credit now is extremely important. Just knowing that it will be available will give developers the assurance necessary to make these additional investments in their projects.

This credit will help to bolster the languishing construction industry in this state and create more jobs. This tax credit may provide the last bit of capital that a developer needs to move forward with their LEED Certified project and create new jobs in the state. It will also help developers make the choice to move forward with projects that are environmentally friendly and energy efficient. Creating a few visible, high caliber buildings can move the market forward, creating new standards for construction and design in the state.

This tax credit is necessary, and it is necessary now. I implore you to support this legislation and help to set a new standard for environmentally friendly design and to create jobs for Connecticut construction workers.

If you have any questions about the ways in which this legislation could impact development within Connecticut or the project at 360 State Street, please do not hesitate to contact me at 203.292.4900.

Sincerely,

Bruce R. Becker